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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

MARCH 1st, 1864.

THE POSITION OF THE ENGLISH PROFESSOR.

By HENRY C. LUNN.

Author of "Musings of a Musician."

IF there really be any truth in the remark that "England is not a musical nation," it certainly cannot be caused by the want of musicians in the country; for assuredly the number of professors who live here by the exercise of the art, in its various forms, will sufficiently prove that we must be awakened by it in the morning, feast upon it all day, and be lulled to rest by it at night. The nursery line that "she shall have music wherever she goes," seems to be actually carried out in the present day; and although we do not certainly obtain it by the means detailed in the line to which this rhymes, there can be little doubt that, with or without our leave, music is around us in most of the waking hours of our life. We dress to the sound of the morning organ under our window,—promenade concerts pleasantly accompany us during our work—a brass band attends us at dinner; and if we go out in the evening, it is to a theatre, where there is a great deal of music,—to a concert or opera, where there is nothing else,—or to an evening party, where the hostess has been trained in the belief that the music-stool must never be vacant; and who, therefore, instead of enjoying any individual performance, is nervously considering who is to be the next performer. Should you remain at home, you have probably the practice of the female portion of your family to listen to; or perhaps a little choral society has been formed in your house; and you are told by those who understand the thing, that they are going that evening to work very hard at some difficult music, and would be glad of your opinion upon the result. Perhaps you may like all this very much—and indeed the taste for music has advanced so rapidly, that it is most probable you may—but it must be thoroughly understood that it is not of the slightest consequence whether you do or not. Music is a tyrant; and you must submit to it, even where you do not love it. To be sure you may go to another room, where the noise is softened down to a measured rumbling; or you may put a handkerchief over your face, and go to sleep in a corner. You may even go good-temperedly to bed; but then you are lucky if you are not roused from your first slumber by the military strains of our brave volunteers, or by the shrill band of a "temperance" society—temperate, alas, in nothing but strong liquors. As it is usually said that it must be an unhealthy place where there are many doctors, or a quarrel-

some and unforgiving place where there are many lawyers, may we not also say that it must be a musical place where there are many musicians? Assuredly the question is now placed beyond a doubt. *We are* a musical nation; and not only love the artists of our native land, but freely extend the grasp of brotherhood to all who visit our shores, giving them place and patronage wherever their talent demands it.

Admitting then the fact of the enormous number of professional musicians who form an integral portion of our permanent population, to say nothing of those who pay us flying visits in the season, it cannot fail to be observed how little *classification* exists amongst the followers of this art; and how perfectly unnecessary it is, therefore, in order to "get teaching" (as it is called), that time and capital should be wasted in mastering perfectly the mechanical and theoretical difficulties of music, in order to call yourself "professor." Let us calmly and dispassionately consider how it is that this anomaly should exist.

The word "musician," although, in our opinion, meaning a person who *has studied music*, is generally accepted as signifying one who gets his living by the exercise of the art in any form whatever. He may be a composer, an orchestral player, a solo performer, a quadrille player, a theoretical master, or anything which relates in the remotest degree to the practice of the science. Hence we see that all start on an equality; and where one man raises himself above another, it is simply by proclaiming his own merits, and getting a sufficient number of people to believe him. No diploma, granted by those competent to judge, is necessary; and the performance of a few pieces, aided perhaps by a brass plate on his street-door, is therefore all that is necessary to constitute a "professor of music."

The numerous evils consequent upon this utter want of classification, must of course be obvious to all. Competition is so active in this, as in all other professions, that a man must often strive to teach all the various branches of the art, in order to place himself on a level with another who does the same; and, as with the general public, no distinction is made between composers, instrumentalists, and vocalists, when they are engaged as teachers, it is obviously better in the present day to do a great many things, than to do any one thing well. Thus pianists teach singing, singers teach the pianoforte, composers and theoretical masters teach both; and the public being totally unconscious that the earnest study of any one of these departments of the art would absorb half a lifetime, engage them, as they innocently engage governesses who undertake to teach everything, *hoping* that the tuition may be good, but *knowing* that it will be cheap.

The cause of this of course lies in the fact that England, much as she encourages music, has made no home for her artists. No rewards for musical talents, however prominently they may

be demonstrated, are ever bestowed by the English nation. No state appointments loom in the distance during the struggling days of the young English musician. Composers and instrumentalists have but one hope,—to persuade the parents and guardians of a certain number of young ladies that they can give lessons; and thus to gain the bare means of living, whilst they endeavour in the meantime to raise themselves above the level of their brother teachers by begging, entreating, or buying the opportunity of displaying their talents to the world. To this dead level, not of musical qualifications, but of musical position, is the English professor reduced by the fact of all living alike by teaching—the solo performer must become a *master*, and the *master* must become a *solo performer*, although all who know anything of the subject must be aware that the training requisite to attain perfection in each of these departments is essentially different; and that so absorbing is the one, that it is rarely possible for the same individual to do justice to the other. Mendelssohn, who felt art like a true artist, continually refers to this subject in his letters; and evidently could not believe in the possibility or necessity of one person becoming composer, performer, and teacher. Any one of these appeared to him enough to engross the entire attention of a conscientious professor; and we see, in spite of his success as a performer, how earnestly he yearned for the power of devoting his mind solely to composition. This indeed is the real truth, and we have a right to listen when such a man speaks. The question is, why is music to be an exception to all the other arts, now that it is admitted so intimately into our daily life? Persons eminent in literature are enabled to maintain their position by the legitimate use of the creative genius with which nature has endowed them. If a man, for instance, have produced a first-rate work, he is known to the world as an *author*, and does not usually find it necessary to instruct little children in spelling in the intervals of his literary labours; such a prostitution of his powers could never be endured by his admirers. Imagine Shelley opening a school, or Wordsworth teaching English grammar, whilst the one is writing “Queen Mab” after school hours, and the other planning his poem of the “Excursion.” The idea can scarcely be conceived without a smile at its absurdity; and yet to this very absurdity is the English composer of the present day reduced; no matter what may be the amount of his genius—no matter by what compositions he may have made his name—to *live*, he must teach children to play on the pianoforte, or to sing the last new ballad, whilst his talents as a composer are seldom exercised, save in his private room after the fatigues of the day. Now, it may reasonably be asked, as the nation holds out no encouragement to her native artists, how a man of mark can make himself heard above the number who live,

like himself, by tuition. To this we unhesitatingly reply that such distinction can only be gained by interest with individuals who have the power of putting you forward. You may be the finest player in England, or you may carry in your pocket the manuscript of a better opera than we have yet heard from a native composer, but how will you make this known? Where is your public concert at which new performers are eagerly sought for? Where your opera house where a new composer is welcomed? Such homes for artists exist not in England, and private interest consequently takes the place of public patronage.

Music, therefore, although as we have seen as much cultivated here as in any nation of the world, is left to struggle into health and power on the principle so often laid down by political economists, that a poor man may grow to be the wealthiest in the land. Hence in this profession, to use a popular expression, “one man is as good as another.” In the medical and legal profession your right to your position must be proved before you assume it. An examination before a competent tribunal is necessary to enable you to practise either medicine or law; but in music you have only to announce that you intend to be a professor, and you are one. If you know very little about the matter, your great consolation is that those who employ you know less; and thus musical tuition—which as we have shown is the inevitable employment of all except those who play orchestral instruments—in spite of its really calling forth the highest artistic powers of a cultivated mind, becomes a trade speculation of any person who can scamper over the keys of the pianoforte, or sing a few of the favourite songs of the day. The columns of the *Times* will sufficiently prove to what an extent this evil has grown. A “brilliant pianist” is desirous of increasing her connection; a “pianist, who has studied under the best masters,” has “two hours disengaged;” a vocalist “is open to an engagement in a school or private family;” and we have seen it advertised that the whole art of music is taught in twelve, or twenty, lessons (we forget which, nor is it indeed of much consequence), and gravely charging the musical profession with obtaining money under false pretences, by insisting upon the necessity of employing more time in the process. Of course it would be unnecessary to notice these announcements, were it not a fact beyond dispute that the professor who has earned his position by study and experience, is openly told that precisely what he undertakes to teach, is taught over the way, or in the next street, for half the terms. It would be utterly vain—and, indeed, far beneath the dignity of an artist—to explain that there are grades in the profession, and that the terms are consequently dependent upon the acquirements and station of the professor. This would have little weight with those who have no knowledge

on the subject; and self-laudation, without any universally acknowledged diploma to back it, is precisely the thing that a true artist would instinctively shrink from.

A guaranteed certificate, granted on examination by a competent body, is therefore what all interested in the progress of healthy art should desire. In advocating this, however, we have not the slightest desire to interfere with the position of those who live by teaching music. On the contrary, we admire and sympathize with the many who work earnestly—and too often, we fear, hopelessly—in this, as in all other honest avocations; but we would wish that the accredited teachers should be known to the public; and that all should thus have the power of seeking the services of those who accorded with their means or desires. It will be unnecessary to prove how important such a mark of distinction is to the teacher. Have we not “Royal Academy of Music” placed after many names, even when, if a certificate were asked for, none could be shown? Do we not see “pupil of Mr. —,” if in any case it can be proved that lessons have been taken of him? And are not these unerring signs that where a diploma cannot be procured, the advertiser will endeavour to confer one upon himself? Granted, then, that some recognised mark of distinction is due to the student who has mastered the difficulties of his art, what is to be the nature of this distinction, and to what body of professors should the appeal be made? In the present day it is true that we have the degree of “doctor,” but no unprejudiced person will say that this degree is granted to all who are competent to enter upon the duties of the musical profession. It is simply conferred upon those who can pay the fees, and pass a certain formal examination. However, therefore, this title may benefit the individual, no discredit can be thrown upon those who have not obtained it, since it is well known that some of the most eminent of the musical profession have never even thought of applying for it. A diploma, such as is given to all who pass the College of Surgeons, is therefore all that is required; and to those who do not become public performers, or operatic composers—in which case the diploma is granted by the public—it would be of the utmost importance, as guaranteeing the reality of the position they assume.

The necessity of this mode of granting certificates being felt by the profession itself, it is obvious that from the profession the movement must spring. The public cares nothing about the matter; and the government takes little heed of art. As in the medical and legal examinations, therefore, a recognised number of professors of the art must constitute a permanent board; and from this board there can be no appeal. It is obvious that the legitimate place for these examinations is the Royal Academy of Music, an institution which has already spread around

England a number of certificated teachers who have revolutionized the frivolous taste for art, and substituted a love for the pure and classical works of the great masters; and if the profession could unite in this desirable object, there would be little doubt that the result must be beneficial to all. A movement like this might be the commencement of a national feeling in favour of the right of music to take that rank in the fine arts from which it has been so long unjustly excluded. It is even possible that eventually the governing powers might feel it a duty to extend their aid not only to art but to artists; and if so, we see no reason why appointments akin to the *Kapellmeister*-ships of Germany should not be conferred upon those who have proved themselves worthy of them; nor, indeed, why some portion of the fund devoted to pensions for men who have attained eminence in art or science, should not be extended to those who have, during a long life, been universally recognised as the representatives of English music.

ROYAL ENGLISH OPERA.

ON Thursday, the 11th ult., was produced the long-expected opera, *She Stoops to Conquer*, the *libretto* by Mr. E. Fitzball, and the music by Mr. G. A. Macfarren. The custom of taking well-known dramatic productions as subjects for operatic treatment appears lately to be on the increase; and although we think it an open question whether a popular drama can be converted into a popular opera, when thrown into the lyrical form, we cannot but dissent from the practice when a sparkling comedy, which has for years held its place in public estimation by reason of its character and dialogue, rather than by its mere story, is cut up into detached pieces of poetry as vehicles for music, with just enough of the original author's words retained to make the audience wish for more. In the present instance it is an utter impossibility to shake off the feeling that you are seeing a comedy interspersed with music; and this not because Mr. Fitzball has carelessly performed his task, or that Mr. Macfarren's excellent and characteristic music does not admirably tone with the subject, but simply because Goldsmith is our first love, and we do not wish the spell to be destroyed. We scarcely know whether Mr. Macfarren may have felt this in the composition of the work; but if so, he has manfully wrestled with the difficulties, and achieved the success he richly deserves. The music of *She Stoops to Conquer*, it may be at once said, is thoroughly English; and this, after the mixture of styles to which we have latterly been accustomed at this national establishment, would be a great point in its favour, were there no other to recommend it. But happily it has, on its own merits, the highest claims to our consideration. It is the work of a conscientious artist, thoroughly conversant with dramatic musical effect, a perfect master of instrumentation, and one imbued with a love for the highest forms of art. Hence we find that his real strength lies in the concerted music, which is throughout the opera written according to the best existing models, and with a power of development which keeps the attention alive, and prevents that weariness which must ever result from mere noisy masses of sound, unredeemed by artistic treatment. The overture, which was unanimously demanded, awakens at once the English feeling in the audience, and is in itself extremely effective. The second subject was excellently played by the wind instruments, especially by the clarinet; and the most popular melody in the opera, “Am I not a pretty barmaid,” is also introduced, so that there is just sufficient to determine the character of the music to follow, which